Memphis policemen continue strike

F Post 8/14/78

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Snubbing a court order, an ultimatum from the mayor and a plea from their union, city policemen extended their wildcat strike Sunday into a third day. The strike and a nighttime curfew apparently discouraged pilgrimages to the burial site of rock 'n' roll idol Elvis Presley, who died a year ago Wednesday.

Non-union policemen, police supervisors and Shelby County sheriff's deputies continued to patrol the city of 650,000 residents, Tennessee's largest. Officials said the city remained calm Saturday night, the second under a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

And about 600 Tennessee National Guardsmen, who arrived in the city Friday from summer training at Camp Shelby, Miss., remained encamped at the Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium. Guard officials said the men, members of an artillery and a Miltary Police battalion, would not be used to patrol city streets unless city officials called for them.

Guardsmen were forced to fight fires in Memphis in early July when the city's firefighters staged a three-day strike that ended under a court order.

The striking patrolmen were ordered by a state judge Saturday to return to their jobs by Sunday morning or face dismissal.

Shortly after midnight, Mayor Wyeth Chandler told a news conference the judge's order had been ignored and the patrolmen would be removed from the city payroll.

However, he gave officers a 24-hour grace period.

Chandler said Sunday he was moving an 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew, imposed Friday, back to 10 p.m. so that night church services would not be disrupted.

The strike appeared to be taking its toll on the number of fans in town for the first anniversary of Presley's death.

"Regardless of what kind of information comes out — the city saying everything is running normal and there's no problems — people are naturally staying away," said Dick Grob, chief of security for Presley's 13½-acre estate, known as Graceland Mansion.

The city had expected to be swamped with visitors during the weekend leading up to the Aug. 16 anniversary date. But Grob said only 5,000 people passed through Graceland Mansion's gates Saturday to view the graves of Presley and his mother.

Shortly before midnight, some 700 policemen, shouting obscenities and blowing whistles, walked away from their elected union president, David Baker, after he appealed to them to honor the Chancery Court order to return to work.